

AGENDA ITEM #9B

March 11, 2005

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director

Subject: Briefing and Possible Comments on Department of Water Resources'
Proposed Comprehensive Program Evaluation (CPE) of the Delta Levees
Program
(For Commission discussion and possible action)

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee should review the draft objectives of the CPE and consider submitting comments to Project Manager Les Harder, Department of Water Resources (DWR):

- that the Delta Protection Commission and/or the Reclamation Districts in the Delta should participate on the Scoping Work Group and any other oversight CPE Committee;
- that the CPE should recognize the connectivity and inter-relatedness of all the Delta islands and their levees and the need to recognize the levee system as a whole, rather than evaluate levees island by island

BACKGROUND:

DWR recognizes that the Jones Tract flooding of last year was an indication of the "fragility" of the Delta levees. In addition, Professor Jeff Mount, member of the CALFED Independent Science Board, recently released a white paper describing some of the key stressors on the Delta levees--including subsidence, sea level rise, and seismic risk. Finally, CALFED has adopted a Ten Year Finance Plan that describes the current and future fiscal shortfalls for long term financing of Delta levee improvements and maintenance.

AGRICULTURE AND LEVEES COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Commission's Agriculture and Levee Committee reviewed the draft objectives of the CPE at their February 24, 2005 meeting and suggested that representatives of the Commission and the Delta Reclamation Districts be appointed to the Scoping Work Group and any other oversight committee. The Committee also recommended that additional funding partners be identified to reflect the Statewide value of the levees.

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION:

The CPE is described in the Department of Water Resources' Draft Flood White Paper (January 10, 2005). The White Paper states:

1. The State should prioritize which islands and levees should be maintained and protected, and to what levels.
2. The State should work with local and federal agencies to establish criteria for funding and participation in any emergency response or flood event.
3. The State should establish a fund for immediate emergency response in the case of a levee failure and island inundation. Such a fund would provide for rapid response to contain the emergency and prevent cascading failures to adjacent islands, and allow time for the coordination of a full, long-term response.

Note: The Agriculture and Levees Committee strongly supported bullets 2 and 3.

The CPE will incorporate additional analysis of the risks of failure of Delta levees (a seismic risk report was prepared by CALFED in 2000). The report will take between two and three years to complete, and will be funded through the levee program, but will not impact funds for the levee subvention program. DWR is setting up two oversight committees: a Scoping Work Group to help shape the purpose and goals of the study (approximately 10 members plus DWR staff) and a second, smaller technical advisory committee (four members).

Currently, the objectives of the CPE are:

1. Evaluation of ongoing and future risk of levee failure over the next ___ (number to be determined) years (flooding, subsidence, earthquake).
2. Identification of probable consequences following levee failures (e.g. water quality, ecosystem, land use, and water conveyance). This would include identifying both qualitative and fiscal impacts by island, and which entities would sustain them.
3. Identification of highest risk regions and islands.
4. Identification of levee maintenance and upgrades that could reduce the risk of levee failure, and costs for different levels of maintenance and levee upgrades.
5. Establish potential priorities for near-term and long-term levee maintenance, by island.
6. Identify land use changes that could be implemented in the near term to mitigate/prevent further levee degradation (e.g. cease farming on State-owned lands on Sherman and Twitchell Islands).
7. Evaluation of levels of risk reduction using different levels of levee maintenance, upgrades and plan form changes.
8. Evaluation of alternative risk reduction plans.
9. Identify near-term actions to reduce risk (purchase Decker Island, proceed with Franks Tract with all deliberate speed, etc.)
10. Identify long-term actions and identify implementation actions needed early on to avoid bottlenecks later (prioritizing and purchasing key islands, revise approach to Suisun Marsh, identify funding mechanism, consider ecosystem enhancements to widen support for program).

Note: The Agriculture and Levees Committee strongly supported actions that would maintain the existing levee system in the near future, and that would evaluate the Delta levee system as a whole.

NOTE: The White Paper was included in the January mailing packet.